

## The Nerk Twins Separated

Both John Lennon and Paul McCartney ought to be seen as talented composers—surely a truism, one would think. A number of factors complicate their status, however. First is of course that they have primarily worked in popular music; at least with some people, their extraordinary commercial success may count against their receiving a just estimation as artists. This is both a social problem and one of critical praxis. The social problem amounts at bottom to snobbery and is unlikely to change: The idea is avowedly that art of any complexity is always the product of long cultivation and of self-conscious craft—implicit is that cultivation is available only to people materially secure enough to spare time for it. It comes down to a feeling, however, that beauty is unlikely to be the product of a bunch of working-class lads mucking about in leather jackets with electric guitars. In fact, popular music does come out of a cultivated tradition, or rather an eclectic blend of several cultivated traditions; for some, this eclecticism may be what's hard to swallow because it entails a mixture of criteria for compositional decisions that can seem confused, especially from a standpoint within one of the traditions. And in fact, most of the artists, while not the products of elite schools and so on, come from the more comfortable part of the working class, which gives them sufficient material wherewithal to make art. Beyond the enjoyment that artists get from their work, a realistic prospect of “bettering” themselves often provides them with the drive to work very hard at their craft.

For criticism, the problem is the lack of an established tradition of serious esthetic consideration of popular music. Despite two or three decades of scholarly attention, we are still laying the foundation for a fully professional praxis, barely having left an era comparable to that of early-nineteenth-century amateur musicologists. (Koechel was amateur, too, so I hope there's no mistaking my intention in using the word—there is no question as to the value of the work, but one must acknowledge the basis on which it has been done.) Perhaps such a tradition can only be established when individual attempts reach a critical mass, so to speak. I hope to contribute to that process with this essay.

One pitfall for previous attempts has been the difficulty in keeping a balance between claiming too much for the music and giving it its due. This harks back to the social problem because which side of the road critics tend to veer off to is determined by

whether they are more concerned with communicating their enthusiasm or with being seen as intellectually respectable. Another stumbling block has been that the form, as a commercial one, is probably more subject than most to external pressures that discourage full development, such as the desire for novelty on the one hand and the kind of conformity that is assumed to assure success on the other.

For Lennon and McCartney, specifically, there is an additional barrier to seeing them as individuals because much of the work they are best known for was produced in a collective.<sup>1</sup> The volume of documentation of the group efforts is huge, naturally, attendant on the phenomenon of Beatlemania, but its bulk may belie its reliability. An alternative path to appreciation of the two composers as individuals may lie in the examination of their works, with a view to discovering both what makes them good art and what distinguishes the work of one man from that of the other. Unfortunately, internal evidence is perennially suspect in a scientistic milieu, and even the onetime fashionable sentiment that complete objectivity is impossible has tended to paint subjectivity as inescapable but, thereby, no less a trap. I will analyze four songs—an acknowledged collaboration, one each where the song is known to be solely by either Lennon or McCartney, and a song about which the memories of the two men conflict over who did what.

The work of criticism and scholarship concerned with the Beatles' music that towers above all others is Walter Everett's two-volume *The Beatles as Musicians*. Everett's response to some of the problematic issues raised here seems to me exemplary:<sup>2</sup>

1. An attempt to distinguish between them might logically be based on the work they did after the breakup of the Beatles, but an argument could be made that the earlier work remains better known because it is better work. (At a 2006 Jazzopen Stuttgart concert [available online at youtube.com], in the spoken introduction to a performance of his song "I'm Dead (But I Don't Know It)," Randy Newman imagined someone telling McCartney, "Paul, you ought to hang it up—your best work was with Wings." The audience got the joke.)

2. Everett (1999, x). Note that volume 1 (1999) covers the Beatles' *later* period (1966–70), volume 2 (Everett, 2001), the *earlier* period (1956–65). For a brief assessment of Dominic Pedler (2003), see the appendix.

If people want to limit themselves to narrow critical goals (such as considering only what the artists who make such music can have intended or the typical member of their audience comprehended), they may do so, but that is hardly a peremptory argument. Someone whose knowledge allows more subtle critical ideas to enter into play ought to be free to do so, even to the extent of asserting that the sources of the pleasure the songs give and of the emotional impact they have may be deeper than either the audience or the artists themselves are capable of putting into words. Some worry that analysis is often the first wave of an assault whose goal is canonicity (seen with some justice as equivalent to being on display, stuffed, in a museum). They are not wrong, but by accepting ruling-class occupation as determinative they only make their own exclusion possible. It seems to me that the attitude of many African Americans to jazz is exemplary in this regard: they have not allowed the music's acceptance into the canon of the larger society to deprive them of what is theirs.

As a resource on many aspects of the production and reception of the Beatles' works, Everett is also likely to remain definitive. For instance, by commanding a mountain of secondary material, in addition to looking at visual records of performances and auditing master tapes where available (or comparing different mixdowns where masters are no longer extant), where documentation fails, he has been able to make persuasive informed guesses about who played what on exactly which instrument in what order. He would be an ideal person to make the much needed corrections to the transcriptions in *The Beatles: Complete Scores*.<sup>3</sup>

Several things are lacking in Everett's work, though this can hardly be called a fault: he has done what he has done for the most part extremely well; he couldn't do everything. For example, Everett has not focused on the individual stylistic differences between the two main composers of the Beatles. With the book's numerous useful comments, particularly about how the group's style evolved over time—often in the form of comparisons between two songs by the same composer: “Lennon does *x* in *Y*, just as he did in *Z*”—it is still its nature to work at the level of extreme detail. One must acknowledge with awe the accuracy of the information, but generalizations about stylistic

3. Fujita et al. (1989).

idiosyncrasies are mostly not part of it. Therefore, one goal of the present essay will be to give such a picture, as a footnote to Everett's work.

In the matter of musical analysis, it must also be said that Everett is not as exhaustive as he is in providing thorough information. Again, this cannot be considered a flaw, in that his analyses are seldom completely wrong or misleading. The most common cavil I have with his analytical examples is that they miss some of the special beauties of the individual works; this, I think, derives from the somewhat differing approaches to analysis that he and I take. Rather than as a corrective, what I offer here should be seen as an enhancement of Everett's work.

As an example, let me briefly discuss a well-known compositional collaboration between Lennon and McCartney, "I Want to Hold Your Hand." (Many previous and most subsequent songs were largely written by one or the other, though always credited to both and naturally brought to their final form by the band working as a group. "In My Life" may well have been a different kind of collaboration altogether, as I discuss below.) For Everett the song is musically about 3rds—the two in the melody, D–C–B followed by C–B–A, then B–F#, giving overall the D–C–B of the first two phrases of the verse (see example 1a). The first pair of 3rds are indubitable (at least after the first verse, a point I will return to), as is the encompassing D–B. In the refrain, however, Everett misinterprets the role of the descending 3rds because he doesn't see the song as being about—really, reveling in—parallel 5ths. (Everett does mention the 3rdless triads in the verse but does not tie them to the structural outer voices, which are less conventional than what his example shows.) Note that the C of the second foreground 3rd, C–B–A, does not exist in the melody until the second verse; in the first verse the word "something" is twice set to a suspended B resolving to A.<sup>4</sup> (In the second system of the example, as a shorthand, I

4. Despite some very obvious errors, the vocal transcriptions in Fujita et al. (1989) are among its better features. The guitars are also done quite well, as are the bass and drums. In general, and not surprisingly, the more prominent the instrument is in the mixdown, the more accurately it is likely to be transcribed. The piano parts, however, even quite prominent ones, are sometimes poorly done. These results apparently derive from the way the scores were said to have been created: different transcribers were assigned to each instrument, and they seem to have varied in their

have summarized verse 1 in the first descent and verse 2 in the second.) As Everett notes in his discussion of “Every Little Thing,” parallel 5ths are for the Beatles a sign of primitive (i.e., sexual) feelings. Some of the appeal of “I Want to Hold Your Hand” is its self-awareness that under its own slightly awkward adolescent naiveté lurks adult sexuality—as is the case in real life.<sup>5</sup>

I hear the verse as a sequence of parallel 5ths, G–D down a 4th to D–A, then E–B again down a 4th to B–F#. <sup>6</sup> The first time this happens it stands for an interrupted descent from scale degree 5, though the 4th degree, C, is skipped, and the 2nd degree, A, is present only by the implication of the V chord on the last quarter of bar 4 and of its own upper 5th, E, as an appoggiatura (incomplete neighbor) to the first pitch of the next phrase of the melody. <sup>7</sup> (The E may be better understood as passing from the low F# to D.) Notice especially how the descent is completed in an inner voice while the head tone is restored—quite characteristic of interruptions. In later verses the skipped C is present in the upper voice but not consonantly supported.

The second phrase of the verse differs from the first only at the end, where the structural upper voice leaps up a 5th from B to F# (instead of down a 4th) in preparation for the high G that begins the refrain. There is no V chord, so the descent pauses on the 3rd degree, B, emphasized by the leap upward of an octave in the melody (the F# is a

abilities. Everett, however (private communication, March 2009), recalls reading that in fact the work was divided by song, not instrument.

5. Everett (2001, 258) on “Every Little Thing”; his discussion of “I Want to Hold Your Hand” is *ibid.*, 200–203. Inasmuch as the rules of conventional tonal music reflect how people process what they hear, we can expect them to implicitly underlie music that may on its surface seem to flout them; insofar as they are mere conventions, they can be safely ignored.

6. In this connection, I wonder if the “chord that made the song” in John Lennon’s opinion was not, as Everett (2001, 200) infers, the E (minor) chord in bar 3 of the verse, but the B (minor? major?) in bar 4. See *ibid.*, quoting Sheff (1981, 117): “We had, ‘Oh you-u-u . . . got that something . . .’ And Paul hits this chord and I turn to him and say ‘That’s *it!*’” If Lennon *was* referring to the E minor chord, then he was wrong.

7. Fujita et al. (1989, 566) misrepresents the chord on the fourth quarter of bar 4 as E minor.

superposed inner voice). This is the moment when the protagonist, after the hesitant and rather coy hints of the first three lines, comes to the point and says “I want to hold your hand” for the first time. It is particularly noteworthy that the refrain’s two repetitions of those words are tied musically to the second phrase of the verse by the avoidance of the interruption: the refrain concludes the descent rebegun in the second phrase, and it also simply repeats the lyrics of the last line of the verse—in other words, both the lyrics and music of the refrain are formally, in their different ways, *extensions*.

As shown in example 1a (on the small staves to the right of the second main system), the middleground upper-voice descent resembles both the foreground melody of verse 1 (where C is skipped) and that of the other verses (where the C occurs unsupported).

The voice leading of the refrain is difficult to understand because the foreground convention of evenly paced root-position chords masks the actual harmonic structure (although the doubling of the “harmonic rhythm” from the verse to the refrain is, as Everett points out, very compelling and evinces a compositional sureness of touch). The deeper structure is a *single* IV–V–I progression. This hymn-tune progression IV–I–V–I, where the first tonic chord is consonant support to the passing 7th of IV, was undoubtedly familiar to the Beatles; for example, see “Hey Jude,” where the structural descent is based on this progression, though partially hidden beneath elaborate cover-tone activity (example 1b). In keeping with the structural role of parallel 5ths in the outer voices, the consonant support of the passing 7th of IV falls to the VI chord in the song—seeking out the 5th that traditional voice leading avoids. To show how the deeper structure relates to the surface, I have generated a four-part setting in example 1c; given the texture and a strict adherence to classical voice-leading practices, I end up with something more like a chorale prelude in the manner of Bach than the Beatles song, but it is recognizably related.

The key to this harmonic interpretation of the refrain lies in reading the upper voice as a series of unfolded 3rds that descend a 6th (which stands in for an ascending

3rd) from G to B. The “beautiful melody” of which Lennon was justly proud<sup>8</sup> is articulated to make the underlying harmony clear: a descending stepwise 5th G–C, or three 3rds, E–G, D–F#, C–E, then a descending stepwise 4th D–A, or two 3rds, B–D, A–C, and then the final third B–G. The harmony that McCartney adds on top duplicates the upper line of the 3rds, G down to B, creating a kind of mensuration canon with the melody!—shown in example 1d. As that example shows, the F# in Lennon’s melody (and as a result, in McCartney’s harmony as well), ought to be heard as an embellishing tone: as a passing tone, both in the descending 5th, G–C but also, on a slightly deeper level, in the unfolded 3rds, and as a neighbor to the superposed inner-voice G in the harmony. Consequently, the V<sup>7</sup> (second half of bar 9) must be understood as considerably more superficial than the IV chord, which really moves directly to I. But the I chord itself occurs in the midst of the large descending 6th of the melody, G–B, articulated by a motivic variation on the interlocking 4ths of the verse, a 5th down, G–C, then a 3rd, D–B. At the deepest level, the descending 6th, G–B, the inversion of a 3rd, is caused by the superposition of the inner-voice F# at the end of the verse. The C in the melody is a neighbor to the B, and the D is an escape tone (incomplete neighbor) on the way. The IV chord is therefore at the deepest level a 7th chord and the VI chord stands for its first inversion. As example 1c shows, the voice-leading situation is one that classical music had to find ways to finesse because of the potential for parallel 5ths in two directions, root–5th of IV moving to root–5th of V, or 3rd–7th of IV moving to root–5th of V. My four-part chorale prelude differs from the actual song in that the song suppresses the 4th degree of the scale in the upper voice. Given the surface proclivities of this song, however, it should not be surprising that its deep structure also involves parallel 5ths.

The repetition of the IV chord is for the most part also a surface phenomenon related to the structure of the melody of the refrain (aa’): note that the descending 5th of the first phrase is curtailed in the second to a 4th, G–D. There has been no interruption

8. Everett (2001, 200), quoting [Wenner (1971, 115–16)]. Brackets indicate a quoted citation, not viewed in the original. Dowling (1989, 60) quotes Wenner to the effect that the song was special to Lennon and he wanted to rerecord it as late as 1970.

harmonically: the second phrase ends by taking up the unfinished business of the melodic descent after recalling just enough of the first phrase to create a parallelism.

The bridge (example 2), as Everett says, contrasts in almost every way possible with the verse and refrain. The rhythm of chord changes returns to one per bar; the driving eighth notes in the rhythm guitar and open high hat, punctuated by syncopated accents on the lead guitar, are now reduced to a gentle tapping on the closed high hat. The lead guitar plays sustained arpeggiated chords, now complete with their 3rds, and the rhythm guitar drops out entirely, though some compensating fullness is provided by the gentler sound of double stops on the bass. Probably most obvious is the change of key: it is so abrupt that the first chord sounds like a minor dominant for a moment before the listener realizes that a tonicization of IV is in progress. (The motion from A in bar 1 of the bridge to G in bar 3 echoes the last two pitches of the refrain's just completed descent.) There are of course subtle things that link the two sections. For example, the syncopated rhythm of the hand claps in the verse is now taken up by the guitar arpeggios. Parallel 5ths continue to govern the voice leading of the outer voices, D–A, G–D, C–G, and the outline of the melody is again a motion in 4ths. They are, however, now ascending 4ths so that, after the upper voice moves from A to D, then to G, we expect C—or, given the parallel 5ths, we expect *E* above the A minor chord at the end of the phrase—but we get neither of the expected pitches.

As is typical of his comments, Everett is perceptive about the relationship between the lyrics and the music in the bridge: noting that the incomplete neighbor *E* over D minor in bar 1 is composed out in the retransition, he suggests that this portrays the emergence from “inside” of the “feeling . . . [that] I can’t hide.” (The expansion of the *E* gives rise to the extension of a four-bar phrase to seven bars—the slightly boxy 4 + 4 + 4 structure of the verse and refrain might almost be seen as a setup for this “hook.”)

Note that on the upbeat to bar 4 of the bridge, the place where the listener's expectations of either a C or a high *E* are thwarted, there is a very brief dip into Lennon's chest register for a low *E* (the lowest note in the melody, in fact)—on, appropriately, the word “inside.” Rhythmically, the note sounds like an anticipation of the A minor chord in the next measure, so it heightens the expectation of *E* by, so to speak, both giving and



withholding it. (One can imagine a more self-consciously “artistic” but inferior version in which the voice recalls the octave leap of the verse with a leap from low to high E.)

That the patterning of the voice leading has led to a situation where two different pitches are expected in the same place is the compositional coup of the song. I believe it makes possible a reading of the retransition that absent such a context would be an obvious first-year-analysis mistake. While I disagree with details of Everett’s reading of the retransition—he hears a kind of stacking of 3rds at the end of the bridge from the root of the V chord, D, up to its 9th, E—he is surely hearing something very like what I am hearing. It is somewhat more complicated than what he shows, however.

The overlap of bar 8 of the bridge with the first bar of the introduction is what initiates the expansion of the second four bars of the bridge to seven bars. At the point of the elision, the listener finally gets the expected C in the melody, like the low E, as a syncopated upbeat. Strong bar 1 of the introduction being forced into the weak position of bar 8 of the bridge here effects a suspension of the hypermeter (reinforced by the suppression of downbeats), during which what ought to be the restoration of D as the head tone is held back. Because of the expectation established that any important pitch in the upper voice will be supported as a 5th above the bass, the D of the repeated “I can’t hide” sounds provisional. The musical effect is of the emergence of D, not its definitive arrival—as if what has been “inside” is being revealed. Recall also that the A of the upper voice (as 2nd degree, likely to be prolonged in a retransition) was represented by the E neighbor in the verse (bar 4). The A as “wrong note” in bar 4 of the bridge may represent the structural reassertion of the 2nd degree: notice that it, like the 3rd degree in the verse, is coupled at the octave; it is also prolonged by a motion to an inner-voice F# and is arpeggiated up over C to E in the motivic expansion of the initial melody of the bridge that Everett notes. Thus, in spite of all the weight D receives, there is still a sense in which the 3rd progression C–E above the V chord is more crucial and D only truly arrives with the return of the verse and of G in the bass. Lending support to this reading—admittedly odd from a “common practice” standpoint—is the organization of the bass in the refrain, which the reader will recall was the prolongation of IV by a motion to its 3rd (C–E) before the arrival of V (D). The codetta in triplet quarters comes to seem beautifully apt as a summary in view of its identity with these two instances of

the same large double-neighbor motion. And of course, it was there in the bass at the very start. It would be interesting to know if the introduction was contributed by George Martin.<sup>9</sup>

“No Reply” is another song that Lennon expressed some pride in, reporting on at least two occasions that his publisher, Dick James, a dance-band vocalist turned song plugger who represented the “old-school” for Lennon, thought it was the first work in which Lennon had expressed something complete, a “story.”<sup>10</sup> Lennon recounts being inspired by an old song recorded by the Rays, “Silhouettes” (written by Frank Slay and Bob Crewe), and there are a couple of superficial resemblances: first, the theme (or as Lennon experienced it, an “image”) of seeing a lover with someone else—though in the precursor, the protagonist is making a *mistake* about that, which among other things introduces an awkward comic moment into what is an otherwise typical pop song about love and jealousy; second, the use of a syntactically oddly placed pause in the melody and lyrics, which in the earlier song is a rather hackneyed late 1950s gimmick (a would-be “hook”). We will see that Lennon, by contrast, integrates this kind of pause into his song in a highly artistic way.

Although Lennon mentioned “In My Life” as the song that marked his conscious move in the direction of more personal expression, “No Reply” was one of a group of songs (“I’m a Loser,” “Help!”) written in the latter part of 1964 and 1965 that showed Lennon was no longer satisfied simply to construct “songs à la Everly Brothers, à la Buddy Holly, pop songs with no more thought to them than that—to create a sound[—in which] the words were almost irrelevant.”<sup>11</sup>

The trend toward a prevalence in pop music of the “singer-songwriter” was identified for Lennon’s generation with Bob Dylan,<sup>12</sup> though it had roots going back at

9. See Martin (1979, 132–33).

10. [Lennon interview in *Hit Parader*, April 1972], cited in Dowlding (1989, 83); Sheff (1981, 147).

11. Sheff (1981, 129). In an odd coincidence, Herman’s Hermits revived “Silhouettes” in 1965.

12. See the Lennon quote in Everett (2001, 255).

least to Hank Williams. What we should focus on in this respect is, however, not whether the same person wrote and performed the song—performers have always been involved in the creation of “material”—but the stance taken toward the material in performance. Most of the great male singers in the pop tradition from Al Jolson to Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra to Elvis Presley did not write. (Jolson’s name in song credits was recognition of his contribution to “making” a song in the commercial sense rather than literally making it—and assured him a cut of the royalties.) Earlier singer-songwriters, such as Bert Williams or George M. Cohan, did write for their own stage personas, but they made their own songs “their own” in *performance*, much as non-composers like Bessie Smith or Fred Astaire did. Other performers who are also writers seem less concerned with a consistent compositional persona, varying it with each song (Mick Jagger); some do not have marked compositional personas at all (the early Beatles and, to some extent, Paul McCartney throughout his career).

Lennon’s work evolved toward a more personal approach that managed to encompass a wider range of output than the average singer-songwriter, such that unlike McCartney, and even taking into account the concurrent evolution of the category, Lennon could not be classed simply as an “entertainer.”<sup>13</sup> Here, however, we are concerned with Lennon and McCartney as composers of remarkable songs. It is compositional craft that distinguishes “No Reply” from a typical teenage *cri de coeur*.

The song’s first break with the norm is its opening—the protagonist’s unaccompanied voice erupts in a long upbeat, presenting, as it happens, the melodic motive upon which most of the song is based (see example 3). Nor is the first chord in the accompaniment the tonic. Because we do not hear I, it is worth investigating how we know what key we are in. Even the first time we hear the song, we know that the first

13. See Everett (2001, 15) (quoted below). This term is not intended by me to be disparaging or to imply anything beyond denoting a practitioner of a certain kind of commercial performance art. A great performer like Sinatra (who indulged an egotist’s self-deprecation by calling himself a “saloon singer”) can take relatively undistinguished, *generic* material and in performance make it seem to be a profound personal statement. The profundity of the song is an illusion of a great performance.

sounded chord is IV almost instantly—well before the second chord, V, confirms it by opposing the leading tone to the first chord’s root. This fact, I think, misled Everett into graphing the song as *starting* with IV,<sup>14</sup> but our perception of the first chord as IV relies on our understanding an implied I as the harmony of the vocal upbeat (just as it is in the second phrase, beginning on the upbeat to bar 5.<sup>15</sup>). Briefly, the entry of the accompaniment coincides with a long note in the melody (a dotted quarter after a series of five eighth notes), so we feel sure that this is a downbeat. The previous measure, comprising the five eighths, counts as full because it is more than half a measure. When we hear a chord enter on the downbeat of what we feel is the *second* measure, we are likely to assume that it represents a chord change; since the probable candidate for the previous implied chord is I, the first chord we hear must be something else. Given the disposition of half steps and whole steps in the preceding eighth notes, the long note in the melody is probably the 6th degree, and a major chord must be IV. (All this in under 100 milliseconds at most.)

The regular pattern in the melody of ascending 6ths and descending 5ths shown in example 3 relies on our hearing an implied G with the I in the first measure, and the pattern gains particular significance because it is immediately broken, both registrally and rhythmically. The fact that the young woman the protagonist is addressing gave him “no reply” is represented *in the music*. That title phrase sets off two strands, one in the lyrics and another in the interplay between the lyrics and the melody. The pattern in the lyrics is straightforward, so I will discuss it briefly before going into the more complex interrelationship of words and music. Note, in the phrases listed below, the phonemic consistency that, as in good poetry, seems to carry some of the sense of the words (Lennon surely was aware of the double meaning of the phrase “I saw the light”—but the following more remarkable pattern was perhaps unconscious):

14. Everett (2001, 263, ex. 3.18a).

15. I number the first measure as “bar 0,” not because I accept Arthur Komar’s ideas about meter, but because the first unaccompanied measure is a hypermetrical upbeat and we are used to counting bar 1 as a strong bar; moreover, to number the first measure as bar 1 would result in an eight-measure phrase ending with bar 9.

no *reply*  
 I saw the *light*  
 I saw the *light*  
 that's a *lie*  
 I'd *realize*  
 the *lies*  
 no *reply*  
 no *reply*  
 no *reply*

What is more, this sound pattern is reinforced by many other long *i*'s:

when *I* came to your door, / no *reply*  
 I know that you saw me / 'cause *I* looked up (etc., many first-person pronouns)  
 I *tried* to telephone  
 I nearly *died*  
 in *my* place

climaxing in the wonderful emotionally distraught confused logic of:

If *I* were you, *I*'d *realize* that *I* / love you more than any other *guy*.

It is, however, the interplay of key words and phrases with the repeating pattern of a short pause on the leading tone that creates the song's narrative thrust, with a notable variety of effects. In the following excerpts from the lyrics, the syllable set on the leading tone is in italics and my interpretation of the effect of the pause is in brackets:

when I came to your *door* . . . no *reply* [portrays "no reply"]  
 I saw you peep *through* . . . your window [enacts her cautious gesture]

I looked up to *see* . . . your face [dramatic pause, as if the protagonist wishes to  
 deny the evidence of his own eyes]  
 they said you were not *home* . . . that's a lie [ironic pause of pretended belief]  
 I saw you walk *in* . . . your door [pausing as if to say, "I was *there*—need I spell  
 out what I saw?"]  
 with another *man* . . . in my place . . .

The last pause reflects the fact that protagonist has reached the crux of his complaint, and the narrative, its climax; "in my place" is just the kind of unnecessary phrase one feels compelled to add in an awkward moment of expecting but not getting a reply.

What ensues immediately is the protagonist's response to the situation (note the similarity of melodic contour between the setting of the word *reply* in the song's first quietly resentful "no reply" and that of "If I were you"). She won't say anything to him, so he proceeds to give her advice. The music of this section, the bridge (see example 4), becomes more driving. Its vehemence is more sustained than in the earlier outbursts ("I saw the light" and "I nearly died") that interrupted the *sang froid* of the cha-cha accompaniment. Given the role of the leading tone in the narrative verses, it is worth noting that the *non*-narrative bridge recomposes important pitches of the polyphonic melody of the verse, in inversion, as the two vocal lines—but *without* the leading tone.

As Everett describes, the bridge continues a rising inner-voice line begun in the verse. His sequence at the 3rd is something I can only see, not hear.<sup>16</sup> The sequence is at the 2nd, for the applied dominant to II is modeled on the preceding V's, including the pause of the melody on C#, the local leading tone. (Maybe the protagonist becomes self-conscious for a moment about his tangled use of the first-person pronoun and in the process undercuts the effectiveness of pop song's favorite assertion.) Probably the most important structural role of the inner-voice line is to compose out the initial 6th from G up to E, but it has a deeper motivic role to play.

The protagonist's response to his lover's bad faith, once he sorts himself out somewhat, is to offer forgiveness. This brings him back where he started, with a

16. Everett (2001, 264, ex. 3.18b).

recollection of the first line, “This happened once *before* . . . *no reply*,” in his conclusion, “I’ll forgive the lies that I . . . heard *before* when you gave me *no reply*.” His pause again on the first-person pronoun could reflect a dawning consciousness of the hopelessness of his situation—this has happened before and probably will again.

These pauses on the C#s setting the word “I” correspond with the arrival on A in the bass and with the completion of a greatly augmented reference to the opening melodic motive (refer again to example 4). The augmentation seems to represent the emergence into consciousness of the dread thought summed up by the motive’s first words, “this happened once before”—the augmentation began precisely at the moment he “saw the light” and is thus also coordinated with the rising inner-voice line that continues into the bridge. The melody then finishes the inner-voice ascent to E by way of a *retrograde* of the opening motive, from the B on which it repeatedly paused: B–C#–D–E–F–E! (Notice how the F is reiterated, recalling the outbursts’ perseverance with E. The two pitches also traded relative importance in the first two statements of the motive: head-tone E to neighbor F and back, then incomplete-neighbor E to chord-tone F and on to passing-tone E. These exchanges could be taken to play out uncannily the theme of “another man . . . in my place.”) The pause on the leading tone and the lack of any harmonically supported melodic descent—exemplifying the unresolved situation—are typical of the structural principles governing the song. The only way for it to end may be just such a return to where it began, *in medias res*. The return seems to embody his wish to turn the clock back to *before* this happened, which comes out for the most part as an obsessive return to the awful moment, incorporated repeatedly into his narrative, *when* it happened—when there was no reply. Perhaps Lennon changed “forget” (sung on an earlier demo<sup>17</sup> when the song was being considered for another performer) to “forgive” because the one thing the protagonist cannot seem to do is, precisely, to forget.

The reprise of the verse has nothing to add structurally and is cut short on a final outburst, where the protagonist is reduced to repeating “no reply.” The snazzy final chord includes all the notes of the melodic motive except the embellishing F, and acts almost like a freeze frame in a movie.

17. *The Beatles Anthology*, 1, disc 2, track 20.

The sustained last chord represents the missing downbeat of the initial long-upbeat measure, and the measure is also the weak last bar in the four-bar hypermeter, both of which contribute to the final chord's abruptness and its sense of time frozen (see example 5).

Lennon's fairly dismissive comment about "Yesterday"<sup>18</sup> apparently came about because he had been accosted once too often with compliments for that particular song—ironically, one of a very few McCartney songs that Lennon had made little or no contribution to writing or recording. It is the Beatle song "covered" most by other performers.<sup>19</sup>

McCartney has related that he awoke one day and had the music of the song complete when he sat down at the keyboard. As any composer knows, perhaps especially one as facile as McCartney, this is cause for skepticism, for it can mean unconscious plagiarism.<sup>20</sup> The words, which as usual for McCartney came later, do show an intuitively analytical understanding of the most unusual feature of the AABA song, its seven-bar A or "verse" phrases. By starting and ending each phrase with the same word, McCartney acknowledges the hypermetric sleight of hand that allows the unusual phrase length to work so well as to go unnoticed by most people. The repetition of the isolated verbal "motto" (*yesterday*, then *suddenly* in the next strain, and *yesterday* again after the

18. "Well, we all know about 'Yesterday.' I've had *so* much accolade for 'Yesterday.' That's Paul's song and Paul's baby. Well done. Beautiful—and I never wished I'd written it." Sheff (1981, 150); also quoted in Everett (2001, 201). Elsewhere, he was not quite so dismissive: "[Paul] wrote the lyrics to 'Yesterday.' Although the lyrics don't resolve in any sense, they're *good* lines . . . [even if] you don't know what happened." Sheff (1981, 118).

19. Everett (2001, 300). Lennon was of course a self-confessed "Jealous Guy," but songs by a singer-songwriter naturally tend to lend themselves less to being performed by others.

20. See *ibid.* [quoting Goodman (1984)]. McCartney recalled: "I didn't believe I'd written it. I thought maybe I'd heard it before, it was some other tune, and I went around for weeks playing the chords of the song for people, asking them, 'Is this *like* something? I *think* I've written it.' And people would say, 'No, it's not like anything else, but it's good.'"



bridge) compensates for a shift in the normal alternation of strong and weak measures by imposing a different symmetry: Odd-numbered bars are strong at first; by the end of the stanza, however, they are weak. The repetition of the initially strong word, now weak with respect to what precedes it, creates a poetic stress that makes up for the metric shift in the music. It is a story that has been told by a number of people on several occasions that the initial bar had for many months the dummy lyric “scrambled eggs” as a placeholder. Lennon reported the communal sense that ideally, the lyric ought to use a single word, and the role the motto plays in providing a different kind of stress may explain why. Producer George Martin recalled that McCartney resisted *yesterday* as too sentimental.<sup>21</sup> (After the anxiety over unconscious plagiarism, he might have also had some residual worries about a remote resemblance to Jerome Kern and Otto Harbach’s “Yesterdays”—in the rising melodic line after the initial invocation of the title word, for example.)

As in “No Reply,” the hypermetric ambiguity of a long upbeat allows for a greater than average subtlety in the song’s construction. In the Lennon song, the ambiguity made possible the strong implication of an unheard tonic chord; in “Yesterday,” the ambiguity is marshaled at the service of the complex transformation of a normative eight-bar phrase into one of seven bars by a combination of expansion and elision. Example 6a shows how, given harmonic change on every downbeat as an equalizer, a long upbeat to a sustained note on the downbeat can be interpreted equally as strong–weak or weak–strong. One way to upset the balance toward strong–weak is to continue melodic motion past the downbeat. George and Ira Gershwin’s “Someone to Watch over Me” is an example that will repay examination.<sup>22</sup> Example 6b shows a simplified—and in the third bar slightly modified—outline of the song, reducing it to the rhythm of the second part of example 6a. Though a strong–weak alternation is adequate to describe the basic hypermeter, the three-bar sequence (bars 2–4) tends to shift the hypermetrical stress to

21. Ibid., citing, respectively, [a 1965 *Melody Maker* interview] and Lewisohn (1988, 59).

22. A seeming counterexample is “How Are Things in Glocca Morra?” by Burton Lane and E. Y. Harburg, though the long upbeat in that case is the last bar in a four-bar hypermeter, as opposed to the duple hypermeter of the Gershwin and the McCartney songs.

even measures, and the augmentation in bars 6–7 may be heard to compensate. Note that structurally, everything is over by the downbeat of bar 7. In fact, the song could easily have had seven-bar phrases in its opening strain, and the two-bar “turnaround” that completes the eight measures probably goes back to the tune’s origin as an uptempo dance number.<sup>23</sup>

Everett mentions “Georgia on My Mind” by Hoagy Carmichael and Stuart Gorrell, in the version with which Ray Charles had a hit a few years before McCartney wrote “Yesterday,” as a possible source of the latter’s striking harmonic move away from I.<sup>24</sup> The Gershwin tune may have been in the back of McCartney’s mind as well, however, with its initial rising line and gradual descent from the octave, and with the prominence of the 4th degree of the scale in a chromatic descending bass line. (One might also mention the words “over me,” which found their way into McCartney’s final lyrics.)

Ultimately, “Someone to Watch over Me” ought to be understood as the result of expansion of four bars to eight, as shown in example 6b: Bar 2 was expanded sequentially to three bars, making four bars out of the first two; then the original bar 4 (with its upbeat) was expanded by augmentation to two bars, making three more of original bars 3–4, for a total of seven; finally, a two-bar turnaround was elided with the downbeat of the last bar to bring the total to eight. “Yesterday” is stranger.

To show what “Yesterday” might have been like with the usual eight-bar phrase structure alternating strong and weak measures, somewhat like “Someone to Watch over Me,” I have recomposed it in example 7a. To me, the most surprising thing about this version is the reduction of the first full measure to an upbeat. Naturally, with an eight-bar phrase, the structure of the lyrics would also have been quite different—among other things, the need for the repetition of the motto word obviated. To say this is to acknowledge that the recomposition is only a construct, not a putative “source” of the song. I do not mean to suggest that it represents some “ideal form” that existed first so

23. Gershwin (1959, 111).

24. Everett (2001, 407, n. 64). Charles later recorded “Yesterday,” singing and playing with an unusually extreme rubato—and “correcting” the first strain to eight bars!

that it could then be transformed into the actual song; I hope, rather, that indulging in this fancy will help reveal how the actual song works.

The first four bars of the normalized version present a sequence in descending 3rds of applied  $\text{II}^7\text{--V}^7$ s, first to VI, then to IV. What might have been the next step of the sequence,  $\text{II}^7\text{--V}^7$  applied to II, is considerably altered to bring the harmony back to I, as in the actual song. A comparison of the voice leading of the first six bars of the eight-bar version with the first five bars of the seven-bar original (example 7b) shows that both expansion and elision are at work in the creation of the beautifully balanced phrase structure of “Yesterday.” While not completely clarifying the process—because the recomposition is intended as a plausible song and not an analysis—it does perhaps uncover one of the elements of the process in the collapse of three bars (bars 3–5) down to one (bar 4). It also clearly calls for more analysis of the point, bar 5, at which the most fudging of the normalized version takes place so as to make it resemble the real thing. I should mention that bars 5–6 of the recomposition could have been harmonized with some variant of  $\text{II}^7\text{--V}^7\text{--I}$ , but that this seemed wrong somehow. See the discussion of example 7c, below, for a possible source of this feeling (in the transformation of a III chord into this I).

I should also point out that the 5th descent from F to  $\text{B}\flat$  shown in the graph of “Yesterday” (bars 5–6) is not literally in the accompaniment because of the exigencies of guitar voicings (and the string quartet follows McCartney’s guitar very closely). Once F moves over E to D on the open sixth string, further downward progress can only occur in a higher register, so McCartney plays the C on the second string, and it moves to the  $\text{B}\flat$  there. The  $\text{B}\flat$  that follows is played on both the second and fifth strings, restoring the line to the lowest possible position, though still higher than where it started. It might be objected that the second descending 5th isn’t there at all—given the root-position II chord that supports B natural. The sense of music is always contextual, however, and the literal descending 5ths that precede and follow (in the bridge) the putative diminished 5th strongly suggest my nonliteral interpretation.

Returning to the question of how the seven-bar phrase works, suppose that a series of four sequential steps like the two in the recomposition underlies the whole

phrase, even the last two bars, which seem quite unrelated. It might look like the nine-bar phrase shown in example 7c. The sequence would still have to be altered somewhat to avoid ending up tonicizing VII. A comparison with the seven-bar original shows that the curious “backtracking” of the bass from IV to I (bars 4–5 of the original) may have its source in some slight alterations (III becoming I; a major VI chord becoming minor and a II chord vice versa) of the chords supporting the melodic motion from the 3rd to the 2nd degree, along with some shifting of the foreground rhythm within bars 6–7 of the nine-bar version (bars 5–6 of the original). Emphasizing arrival on this III turned I with a  $\text{II}^7$ – $\text{V}^7$  progression (which in the eight-bar recomposition “seemed wrong somehow”) would distort the theorized underlying nine-bar structure too radically, for the III is a second-order applied chord to the II in bar 7 of the nine-bar version. Note that the  $\text{V}^7$  in bar 4 of the actual song can be heard as part of a prolongation of *IV*. Though this is admittedly not the most natural way to hear it—in nineteenth-century music such a passing chord would more often have been a  $\text{I } 6/4$ —entertaining the interpretation can give one the feeling of almost catching the magician at work. The first compression now appears to be of two bars down to one, just at the point where the alternation of strong and weak becomes vexed. Then another, also two to one, at the end of the phrase, readjusts the hypermeter.

The uses McCartney puts this remarkable structure to are, in an unshowy way, equally remarkable. I want to propose that there is a “plot” in potential *in the music itself*, inasmuch as different kinds of motion can suggest its features, and that McCartney’s sensitivity to these factors allowed him to write words that fit the music as though they preceded it.

The general trend of both outer voices is downward from the octave. The two elements that act against this overall direction are the rising melodic line of bar 2 and the return of the bass to I in bar 5. The slow but accelerating descent in the bass (see example 7d) evokes a crepuscular mood, as in both increasing darkness (sadness, loss) and the implacable passage of time (thus “Yesterday”); the “revision” of the bass descent after the backtracking seems to portray a process of rumination in which a quickening—*anxiety? hope?*—briefly arises (at the return to I and the mostly quarter-note descent to  $\text{B}\sharp$ ) only to end in resignation (when the  $\text{B}\sharp$  moves down to  $\text{B}\flat$  rather than up to C); whatever this thought may be dwelling on, it apparently verges on the obsessive, given

the persistence of the A in the melody; that both outer voices move downward in concert increases the sense of a foregone conclusion against which the melody's attempt to rise is futile (played up by the lyrics' poignant comparisons of past and present)—especially given the *failure* of the melody to reach the tonic, F, at the octave, except as an incomplete neighbor of E.

If the downward trend of the music is reflected in the sadness of the situation described by the words, the rising line is used to set words that reflect the better state of things that has been lost or that seem to portray the protagonist's resistance to the present:

all my troubles seemed so far away . . .  
I'm not half the man I used to be . . .  
love was such an easy game to play . . .

The chiming of A at the end of each verse with the first note of the rising line seems to echo this desire to wish away the bad situation and introduces A's ultimate import as a head tone that "refuses" to descend.

The revision in the bass is especially notable because it brings about the local arrival on B $\sharp$ , which is also the nondiatonic pitch in the striking minor VII<sup>7</sup> (II<sup>7</sup> of VI) harmony that accompanied the start of the melody's rising line. Instead of counteracting the downward trend of the music, however, B $\sharp$ 's motion to B $\flat$  then demands continued downward motion (to A). Thus, the wish expressed in the rising line in the melody is denied in the bass with the very pitch that seemed to offer hope of an altered situation (of which the local tonicization was a metaphor<sup>25</sup>). Sometimes our wish for a certain outcome leads us to misread events as confirming its possibility. We later realize our mistake, seeing that in fact what we took as positive evidence was the opposite and that our wish led us into self-deception. The B $\sharp$ , by forcing the B $\flat$  on to A, brings home that its own earlier meaning in connection with the rising melody has been misread. Of course the A never arrives in the bass. Its persistence in the upper voice (not to mention the high

25. See Lewisohn (1988, 10), where McCartney says modulation "takes you to a whole new world."

pedal tone in the first violin in the last verse) is thus not evidence of hope so much as an insistent refusal to accept reality, which is summed up in the odd relationship between past and present implied by the line “I believe in yesterday.”

One can speculate that the essentially identical structure of the outer voices (coming very close to being parallel octaves at first) might be thought to represent two levels of consciousness: the upper voice, the willful ego, and the bass, the more intuitive “gut knowledge” of reality that the ego would like to deny. While the refusal has the last word, it seems all but defeated by the end of the song. (The protagonist can no longer even find words: the last repetition of the refusal is hummed—one might almost fear for his sanity.)

I have said nothing of the B section, or bridge, and frankly, it seems less interesting at first, but it may be the section of the song that tips the protagonist’s situation at the end toward being moving, where his persistence might have seemed foolish or unhinged. Everett asserts that it in effect recomposes the verse,<sup>26</sup> and to be sure it reuses some of the voice-leading elements of the A section (see example 8a). His reference to  $d^2-f^2-d^2$  as one of these elements is mysterious to me because I hear no such boundary play in the verse but rather—as shown in my graph—a descent from the implied octave, F, over E, to D. Certainly, in that section, what must be Everett’s first D is a completely unsupported passing tone, and as I said, the F seems to me to be an incomplete neighbor (or *échappée*); Everett apparently hears it as an anticipation of the D minor harmony of the next measure (which would make the E on the downbeat an accented passing tone rather than a suspension).

In one respect, I think it is best to understand the bridge as not so much recomposing as restating some of the voice leading—the descent from the octave, for example—but in less recondite ways. In particular, the 5th descent from F to B $\sharp$  in the bass is domesticated as a descent from D to G, and the “missing”  $II^7-V^7-I$  is represented literally by its bass tones (though the 2nd degree supports the now-diatonic VII chord).

26. Everett (2001, 302–3). He offers no graph, so I may misrepresent him on some points.

Note also that in the bridge the applied chords are given their more “normal” place in a strong bar.

The lyrics, too, give more details of the plot in the bridge (if, as Lennon complained, making nothing definite, still doing so quite artfully):

why she had to go . . . she wouldn't say . . .

I said something wrong . . .

The protagonist's vagueness can make him seem “clueless,” but his perseverance does not perhaps reflect his basic character so much as the shock he has received.

I wonder whether the bridge was part of what McCartney woke up with—it seems more consciously crafted: for instance, in the way the ascending 3rd from D to F echoes the same 3rd an octave lower at the end of the verse (and not, *pace* Everett, the earlier rising line); this 3rd is part of the D–F–A setting the words “in yesterday,” upbeat to downbeat of bar 7 of the last verse (see example 8b). The canon on the descending 5th between the outer voices, D–G in the bass and E–A in the melody, can seem merely clever compared to the elegant balance of the initial seven bars, but it is one link in a musical chain, as well.

The feature of the bridge that cries out for notice is the extraordinary E $\flat$  in the cello the second time the bridge is heard, and this single pitch is in some sense the linchpin of the song's final effect. According to George Martin, this and the high A pedal of the last verse were McCartney's contributions to the string quartet arrangement.<sup>27</sup> It is the only time E $\flat$  occurs in the song, and it is deeply expressive of the prevailing mood. I would like to believe it emerged from the subterranean world I have theorized, where the pitch figures in the elided second step of the descending-3rd sequence. Locally, at any rate, the figure responds to the melody's 3rd, E $\sharp$  to C, then moves on to A, using the B $\flat$  implied by the canon as a passing tone. The chromatic line thus initiated continues to D–C $\sharp$  in the applied chords to VI and links back to the first note of the repetition of the canon.

27. Lewisohn (1988, 59).

The motivic expansion of the first four pitches of the bridge melody, A–D–E–F, in the second four bars probably contributes to the melody’s quality of inevitability; more significant is the compositional integration of the refused 3rd descent (now transposed to the dominant, E–D–C–E) with the descending 5th, E–A—despite the 5th being interrupted by E’s move to F. The refusal wants to assert victory by resolving upward to the high tonic—harmonized by I for the first time—but the descending 5th cannot be refused. Yet as the voice itself is drawn down at the end of the second bridge in an acknowledgment of the reality the descending 5th represents, the ultimate goal of the rising line D–E–F, the high A, is taken up by the pedal in the first violin. If we assume that the model for this high D–F in the bridge is the lower D–F in the D–F–A of “in yesterday” at the end of the verse, the isolation of the high A in the violin seems to say that what it represents is out of reach of the protagonist—recall that among other things, it represents the past—and helps makes his persistence in the face of defeat something we can identify with and feel for.

Everett has enumerated some of the differences between Lennon’s and McCartney’s individual styles in general terms:

While McCartney may be said to have constantly developed—as a means to entertain—a focused musical talent with an ear for counterpoint and other aspects of craft in the demonstration of a popular common language that he did much to enrich, Lennon’s mature music is best appreciated as the daring product of a more general, largely unconscious, searching but undisciplined artistic sensibility, a less-than-“perfect” vehicle for expressing deeply held personal truths.<sup>28</sup>

One is grateful that he goes on to describe the all-too-common sociological explanations (Lennon was middle-class, McCartney, working-class) as oversimplifications, bringing to bear the evidence that such theories conveniently ignore.

28. Everett (2001, 15) (slightly modified from [1999, 9]).



I would like to propose some more specific distinctions between their individual styles, then test my hypotheses against the case of a song, “In My Life,” where the two men’s memories of who created what did not gibe, a rare occurrence. The differences in style are probably traceable both to their methods of working—Lennon often started with words, McCartney, almost always with the music<sup>29</sup>—and to differences in their talents: with the caveat that it is not to be taken as evaluative but only comparative, one could classify them with reference to Mozart and Beethoven. McCartney, the more naturally “gifted” musically, is like the former, and Lennon, the latter. Lennon was a man who has to work hard for his ideas; McCartney, one to whom ideas seem to occur almost effortlessly. Lennon’s successes are the result of dogged craft overcoming the limitations of a narrow, though very real, talent. McCartney’s failures are the result of too much reliance on what comes too easily.

The distinctions were not initially systematic for me but were features I happened to have noticed, listening to the music over the years. The first hallmark I want to call attention to is Lennon’s far greater use of melisma, particularly on words in the middle of a syntactical unit. In a quick survey of the output of the two men during the Beatle era, I found few instances where McCartney’s melismas were more than three or four notes, and *none* that occurred anywhere but on the last syllable of a unit of lyrics.<sup>30</sup> While the great bulk of word setting in both men’s work is syllabic, there is a notable range in Lennon’s from extended melisma to a playful cramming of many syllables into a short space (“Anytime at all, / all you gotta do is call . . .”)—in short, far greater freedom in the relationship between words and music. In contrast, McCartney seems at times to put in unnecessary words to preserve the syllabic quality. This could be a natural result of his practice of adding the words to the music—one assumes that an identical verbal rhythm ought to be found to fit an already existing melodic rhythm—but it probably also reflects his taste for older popular-song traditions: music hall songs and the like were far more syllabic than the blues-derived pop songs of the 1950s. McCartney did share with Lennon

29. Everett (1999, 11).

30. As does, for example, the retransitional setting of “me” in “What You’re Doing” (1964), though a stylistic outlier in terms of length.

a love of rhythm and blues, but note that Lennon describes one highly melismatic song, “All I’ve Got to Do,” as “that’s me trying to be Smokey Robinson again”; according to McCartney, another, “Not a Second Time,” was influenced by the Miracles as well; and Lennon described “Tell Me Why” as “like a black-New York-girl-group song.”<sup>31</sup> Then again, it is possible that Lennon, as a “word” person, felt less self-conscious about them. It is hard to imagine Lennon sensing the putative plot in the music of “Yesterday” and fitting the words to it the way McCartney did, just as it is difficult to picture the latter constructing a lyric as poetic in its use of sound and syntax as “No Reply” (well-made though the lyrics of “Yesterday” are).

McCartney’s greater facility in composition is seen in his greater comfort with tonal harmony as much as it is in the easy flow of his melodies. Lennon’s melodies are often modular—and it must be acknowledged that these short ideas are often strikingly original (“Norwegian Wood,” for example, or the refrain of “Across the Universe”) even though Lennon will simply repeat them or string several of the modular ideas together; they also frequently have the leaps and larger ambitus characteristic of instrumental as opposed to vocal music—maybe his Aunt Mimi’s classical music had some impact.<sup>32</sup> “Tomorrow Never Knows” (1966) is the *echt* example of these characteristics, but recall that many of the catchy early Beatle songs—catchy in part because of being repetitious and modular, but also because the ideas are memorable—were Lennon’s. Contrary to the notion that he couldn’t be bothered with getting the music right (which Everett reports but doesn’t endorse), Lennon’s songs often bear traces of the effort he put in to them—this is partly what suggests the comparison with Beethoven. Perhaps as compensation,

31. Quoted from various sources in Dowlding (1989, 49, 57, 71, respectively).

32. See Everett (2001, 14). Note that three McCartney songs that Lennon singles out as favorites all feature triadic “horn call” melodies: “Here, There and Everywhere,” “For No One,” and “Got to Get You into My Life.” Quoted from various sources in Dowlding (1989, 138, 142, 144, respectively).

Lennon developed an interest in unusual harmony.<sup>33</sup> There are as a result two additional hallmarks of Lennon's style that can be mentioned: the deliberate use of different chords for the repetition of the same melody ("Help!" and perhaps the chorus of "She Loves You") and the use of unusual kinds of mixture. His use of all major chords in "Day Tripper" (E: I, II, III, IV, V, VI) and "I Am the Walrus" (A: I, II, natural III, IV, V, and natural VI and VII) has no parallel in McCartney's output, which, though very influential in enhancing the harmonic palette of post-Beatles popular music, was highly conventional with respect to tonal music in general. To round out the picture: as Everett points out, it was McCartney whose interest in broadening his musical culture, from Baroque music to *musique concrète*, led the way for Lennon. It is even fair to say that Lennon's unconventionality sometimes derived from his relative ignorance, but it is completely to his credit that by hard work and imagination he made something original—many artists in a similar position fall back on cliché or formula. George Harrison was the Beatle who brought unusual meters to the group via his interest in Indian music, but Lennon quickly made them an intrinsic part of his own style.

In the numerous interviews both Lennon and McCartney gave after the breakup of the Beatles, it is remarkable—"gratifying" is McCartney's word<sup>34</sup>—that there is little disagreement over who contributed what. The only song where there is much conflict between their recollections about the music is "In My Life." (The words of "Eleanor Rigby" are also at issue.) Given that "In My Life" was on one occasion voted the "greatest pop song of the twentieth century" (in a poll in *Mojo* magazine, 2000), this is understandable. (Such hyperbolic claims notwithstanding, it *is* a fine song.) At any rate, McCartney remembers that Lennon had the words but couldn't come up with a tune. So McCartney recalls "going off for half an hour and sitting with a Mellotron he [Lennon]

33. I recall reading Lennon quoted (probably in the late 1960s) that he felt self-conscious that his ideas were short and that his songs were often cobbled together from a number of such ideas but have been unable to locate the source.

34. Miles (1997, 278).

had, writing the tune, which was Miracles inspired.”<sup>35</sup> Lennon says McCartney “helped” with the “middle eight” (the bridge); he acknowledges that the vocal harmony was, as almost always, McCartney’s.<sup>36</sup>

One difficulty that some people<sup>37</sup> find with Lennon’s version of events is what he means by the “*middle eight*” because the form of the song is ABBB’. This is, however, easily explained: All four phrases of the song end with a rising 6th, E to C#, and the first, second, and fourth of them—the two A’s and the B’—precede the 6th with a melisma centering around the 2nd degree of the scale. In thinking back on the song out of context, it would be easy to remember it as ABBB’A (or AABA). I doubt this provides much fodder for the authorship-by-McCartney case (“Lennon can’t even properly remember how the song goes”)—it is clear that Lennon was referring to the BB’ as the “middle” eight bars, and they do serve the function of a bridge in providing contrast to the opening strain (for example, starting on VI instead of I).

Given the hallmarks of Lennon’s style proposed here, I think a reasonable reconstruction of the history of the composition of and apportionment of credit for the song is possible. The melody may very well be McCartney’s since it is almost completely syllabic. The melismas are either Lennon’s contribution or McCartney’s imitation of Lennon’s style (or they might well have “just happened” when Lennon sang the tune). The guitar ritornello has Lennonesque qualities of modular brevity, memorability, and ranginess. Maybe, despite having no tune in mind for the words, Lennon did have the ritornello, with its rising 6th, C# to A, and McCartney decided to integrate the idea into

35. [Goodman (1984)], quoted in Dowlding (1989, 122–23). The Mellotron was an early attempt at a “synthesizer,” with tape strips of different instruments activated by a keyboard. (Nowadays, it would be classified as a keyboard-triggered analog *sampler*.) The “flutes” at the beginning of “Strawberry Fields” are played on a Mellotron.

36. See Everett (2001, 319); Sheff (1981, 130, 151). In the last instance, Lennon is most concerned that it be known that the *words* were finished (“signed, sealed”) before McCartney saw them. The song evidently was personally very important to him. That he thought of it as his alone is therefore not surprising—and it may be the source of the conflicting memories.

37. The author of the wikipedia article on the song, for example.

his melody.<sup>38</sup> Everett notes that the quick initial rise of an octave in the melody resembles McCartney's "Yesterday," suggesting the resemblance as possible evidence that McCartney wrote "In My Life"<sup>39</sup>; perhaps it is, but the fact that the latter song's octave is from dominant to dominant while the former's is from tonic to tonic is worth noticing. It suggests that the key of A was already established by the ritornello and that McCartney, knowing that Lennon would sing lead, chose to work with his tessitura.

The variation in the harmonies between the two B phrases points to some tinkering by Lennon. I would guess that both were more like the B'—perhaps the chords were F# minor, B minor, D minor, A—and that Lennon substituted D and G for the second and third chords of the first B phrase and changed the B minor to major for the B' phrase. (The G chord has a Lydian flavor with the C# in the melody, as in Lennon's "Ticket to Ride"—surely more to the point than the mere use of natural VII, which both men did, and which Everett deploys in support of his argument for the difficulty of disentangling their individual styles, especially during this period.<sup>40</sup>) These changes could account for Lennon's memory of the contrasting section as the locus of collaboration. With the melisma and the rising 6th, which seem like his style of writing, he could have forgotten that it was McCartney who in fact wrote the tune; as was suggested, it is possible McCartney was even trying to sound like Lennon by imitating the Miracles.<sup>41</sup>

One feature of the A phrases that to me seems more like Lennon should be mentioned—though Everett finds it supports McCartney's claim because it involves the

38. McCartney is quoted claiming the guitar riff in Miles (1997, 278), but with somewhat less assurance than that he wrote the tune. It must be said that the evident lack of rancor in his recollections lends them credibility.

39. Everett (2001, 319).

40. Ibid., 320.

41. The description AAB B' does not reveal fully how Lennonesque the tune is in its modularity. The A's could be represented as *ab* and the B's as *cb* (with a variant), so that the whole is *ababcb'cb*. If my guess at McCartney's original (ex. 9a) is at all correct, then the *a*'s and *c*'s were also even more similar.

bass (and let that act as a proviso governing this whole speculation): the “bad” voice leading of a I 4/2 moving to IV in root position. It does resemble the change of register of the descending line in “Yesterday,” but there the shift occurs smoothly between the root and the 7th; in “In My Life” the shift is, awkwardly, between the 7th and its tone of resolution. The use of a major II may also resemble “Yesterday,” but that doesn’t prove that it is *McCartney’s* contribution. Like many an artist, Lennon knew what to steal. Major II followed by IV also seem to have been in the air in 1964–65 (for example, the Rolling Stones’ “As Tears Go By”); major II followed by *minor* IV, in contrast, is the kind of unusual progression that Lennon in particular liked to use.

Example 9a shows my “speculative reconstruction” of what McCartney’s first draft looked like. The main differences from the final version are (1) III instead of VI in bar 2, (2) the more syllabic setting in the bridge, and (3) the use of the same chords in both B phrases, previously discussed. (I also had a little fun at McCartney’s expense, making it tamer in a few other ways, but they are not to the point of this discussion.)

The III chord in bar 2 seems to me more likely because it harmonizes the melody’s E on the downbeat as a chord tone. The only McCartney song before 1966 that treats a pitch in the melody on the downbeat as a nonchord tone that is also both approached and left by skip is “I’m Looking Through You”<sup>42</sup>; far more commonly, McCartney leaves accented dissonances by step. In addition, as example 9b shows, the dissonance in “I’m Looking Through You” is prepared by the guitar introduction in the same register as the voice, and the chord on the downbeat is an appoggiatura chord to the following chord, with which the melody is consonant. (The dissonance is on the word

42. It was almost exactly contemporaneous with “In My Life”—both were new songs and recorded in late October to early November 1965. An exception that might be raised to my categorical statement about McCartney’s dissonance treatment is the 9ths in the bridge of “And I Love Her” (1964). They are not, however, on the downbeat; also, Lennon likely had something to do with that part of the song. See Dowlding (1989, 70), quoting [Lennon’s *Hit Parader* interview, April 1972] and Sheff (1981, 146); when Miles (1997, 122–23) plays “Paul’s grandfather,” citing Lennon’s 1972 claim (“mine”), McCartney denies it, but volunteers a statement (“he helped”) that agrees with Lennon’s 1981 version.

*through* and can be understood to express the pain of discovery; or perhaps the misleading relationship between melody and harmony—the melody is the real consonance, the harmony, what has to change—reflects the misleading aspects of the personal relationship that the singer complains of.)

The syllabic setting of the bridge of the speculative version of “In My Life” may seem awkward, but this is largely a product of how used to the actual setting one has become; it is hard to believe that Paul McCartney would have, on his own, set the word *places* to four notes, for example. In this connection, and in all honesty, the slight awkwardness of some of the word setting in the actual song (one might point to “though some have changed” in the first A phrase) ought to count as evidence *for* McCartney’s authorship.

W. H. Auden mourned William Butler Yeats (and his own youth) with the words “poetry makes nothing happen,” but in at least one respect, he was wrong. Poetry, and art in general, can add to the sum of human happiness—dependably, even if often only briefly. This happiness includes pleasure, but that is only one of its aspects. Others are the sharing of experience by putting into words, music, images, and so on what most of us cannot (or do not), and the provision both of an analgesic against the pain of life and of the consolation of meaning. If Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is correct that happiness can be understood as “flow,” then art can promote it as a kind of cod liver oil for the soul. For most people, how this happens is of little interest: too much delving into the workings is suspect, even threatening. (Might we not lose the effect if we know how the magic is done?) Unschooled artists, such as the Beatles, often share this dread. The critic, however, is the sort of lover who has to spell out at length and in great detail exactly what it is about his love that moves him to happiness—at once comic and heroic, like Orlando in *As You Like It*.

Setting aside the critic’s need to dwell on what for most people is an unconscious element in their enjoyment, artists might be valued according to how much they contribute to humanity’s happiness. The greatest would not lose standing because their works are infinite fountains of happiness, as much as of pleasure, beauty, and wisdom. Yet there are artists whom most people would recognize as being of considerably lesser

stature whose mention as contributors to human happiness would, even so, bring forth a smile and a murmured, “Yes, I suppose they are.” Along with figures like Stephen Foster, Arthur Sullivan, John Phillip Sousa, Scott Joplin, and the twentieth-century flowering of the American musical theater in Jerome Kern, Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, and the rest, John Lennon and Paul McCartney can both be listed in this company.

## Appendix

Dominic Pedler’s book, *The Songwriting Secrets of the Beatles* (2003), despite its size and the evident effort that went into it, cannot be said to be definitive. The overall impression is of a very able and knowledgeable workman (who loves his work) stymied by the tools at hand. Reading the book I had an unjust thought, and I apologize for mentioning it, but it conveys part of what about the book bothered me: *Someone who shoots so many arrows is bound to hit a bull’s-eye more than a few times.*

Pedler has collated similar harmonic progressions, a huge task of considerable value in itself, but often at the cost of missing the trees for the forest. Beyond the systematic sorting of series of chords, there are very few insights that would not be readily available to anyone with more sophisticated theory at their disposal. To be fair, the kind of specific insight that my work is aimed at is really the opposite of what Pedler is after, and he has a very different audience in view (inasmuch as I can put myself back in the shoes of someone who would find the book revelatory, I think he judges his audience very well). Given our divergent approaches, it is perhaps not surprising that he is dismissive of attempts to describe the individual styles of Lennon and McCartney.<sup>43</sup>

One problem with *The Songwriting Secrets of the Beatles* is Pedler’s style. While its enthusiasm and cheerfulness tend to moderate one’s reaction, the prolixity can be trying—this is, after all, a book of more than 700 pages, not a magazine article. The most serious drawback, however, is a chord-based theoretical apparatus in which counterpoint is almost nonexistent. This will be justified by those who take the music at face value. In their view, the songs of Lennon and of McCartney, like the popular songs of their

43. Pedler (2003, 650ff).



predecessors, are for the most part tunes and chords, with a patina of an “arrangement.” The present article makes obvious that I don’t agree.

Not fatal to the usefulness of Pedler’s book but perhaps indicative of the confusion that results from its inadequate theory are such solecisms as “non-functioning secondary dominant seventh chords.”<sup>44</sup> I do understand what it is intended to mean (and I realize that Pedler didn’t invent the term), but it seems tantamount to saying “I cannot drive in nails with my screwdriver, therefore I will build my house without them.”

There is a brief discussion of Schenker early in the book,<sup>45</sup> and as far it goes (not very) at least it doesn’t get anything wrong (well, except the highly dubious suggestion that Schenker would have liked the Beatles!)—this is a noteworthy accomplishment. But it has no impact on most of the discussion of the Beatles’ songs. (I thought I read of a promised melodic analysis of McCartney’s song “I Will,”<sup>46</sup> and humming the tune to myself, I thought, *If he can pull that off, I will be impressed*—he correctly identifies it as a descent from the fifth degree, so I had hopes. If the analysis is in the book, I wasn’t able to find it, however, either where I thought it was said to be [Appendix 3] or by using the index.)

Such a limited approach can sometimes be accompanied by a defensive attitude, which, thankfully, Pedler shows no sign of whatsoever. Much more could be mentioned that is positive about the book, and for the right audience it does a very good job (as the reviews on amazon demonstrate). In the present context, however, it is more a symptom of the situation that I described at the beginning of this article than evidence of progress.

44. Ibid., 106ff.

45. Ibid., 8ff.

46. Ibid., 10.

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